

## JAILHOUSE RELIGION

Our text today is found in Acts 16:9-40. In the center of this divine narrative we see the stellar conversion of the Philippian jailer. Everyone here can be especially thankful for this momentous event because it is the beginning of the evangelism toward the west. From this point onward the work of God began to come in our direction, until it consumed Europe and crossed the Atlantic to America.

Religion does not save us, for it speaks of rituals and a behavior. On the part of Paul and Silas, they definitely have a belief that behaves. James 1:26 and 27 says we need a pure religion. A pure religion will drive us to help the needs of people and there can be no greater need than to have a personal experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. The conversion of the lost is Paul's chief objective in the world. Paul and Silas' religion is so pure and powerful it will even work in a jailhouse. What is jailhouse religion? It is a religion of:

### 1. Persecution

In Acts 16:16-24 we see a young lady in physical bondage and in spiritual bondage as well. Rather than rejoicing that she had been delivered from her spiritual bondage, her masters were upset because *"...the hope of their gains was gone..."* (Acts 16:19b). They cared nothing for this girl except what that could get out of her. There is always abuse in a society where Jesus is not Lord. I wonder if this incident came to Paul's mind when he wrote thirteen years later, *"For the love of money is the root of all evil..."* (I Timothy 6:10). When Paul was in Ephesus and the Gospel was being embraced in Acts 19:20, we see that *"...there arose no small stir about that way"* (Acts 19:23) because the idol makers saw their business was in danger, which meant Paul and his evangelistic team were in trouble. *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (I Timothy 3:12). Earlier in the book of Acts we witness the disciples with a positive attitude toward persecution for Jesus' sake: *"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name"* (Acts 5:41). Jesus promised, *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:1-12).*

## **2. Patience**

Acts 16:25a says, *“And at midnight....”* Paul and Silas were not murmuring and complaining that God had given them a raw deal. There was no outburst such as, *“Is this what we get for serving you?”* By this time of the night most people had retired for the evening. Not Paul and Silas! They were pumped and ready to go! *“For ye have need of patience that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise”* (Hebrews 10:36). The fulfillment of God’s promises often comes after we have gone through a season of waiting.

## **3. Prayer**

Acts 16:25b says, *“...Paul and Silas prayed...”* (Acts 16:25b). In Acts 12:5-16 we see that prayer had the power to release Peter from prison. Prayer is liberating! Prayer is the key that unlocks the most difficult doors. As we read the Scripture we cannot escape the primacy of prayer. In the chapter we are studying this morning (Acts 16) we see the mighty move of God was kindled by a ladies prayer meeting (Acts 16:13)! It is no coincidence that prayer precedes extraordinary moves of God in the Bible. We see this evidenced demonstrated in I Kings 18:37,38; II Chronicles 7:1-4; Luke 24:49; Acts 2:1-4.

## **4. Praise**

Acts 16:25c says, Paul and Silas *“...sang praises....”* The ancient Jews sang the Psalms. I would imagine they sang songs that edified and gave faith such as Psalms 143, 121, and 18. I can almost hear them singing with exuberance Psalm 105:14-20. II Chronicles 20:22-25 teaches us that spiritual warfare has much bearing on the physical world around us. Jehoshaphat and his people found precious jewels after they defeated their enemy through praise. A. W. Tozer points out through this passage that praise is the missing jewel of the Church.

## **5. Purpose**

Acts 16:25d says, "...and the prisoners heard them." There is always purpose behind every suffering the Lord puts us through. Some of these purposes are not known until we get to heaven. In this chapter we understand that God wanted to save the whole jail, not just the jailer. I am certain if should you ask Paul when you get to Heaven, "Was it worth it?" He would give you a big affirming, "Yes!" We see that Paul told the jailer, "...we are all here." (Acts 16:28). How would you get men incarcerated for crimes to stay in the vicinity of the jail when an earthquake has just freed them? I suggest to you that it is evidence that "...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). And "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

## **6. Power**

In Acts 16:26 a mighty local earthquake hit that jail with a tremendous shaking that miraculously not only took the prison doors off hinge, but also loosed the shackles that bound them. I heard an old preacher say years ago, "The average Baptist doesn't have enough power to blow the fuzz off a peanut." But the protagonists of our story are not average. Men and women who pray and praise through all of their circumstances have mighty manifestations of God's power. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). One minister caught up in his message from this text, excitedly said, "Praise God! Paul came out of that jail singing 'Amazing Grace' with a jail door under one arm and a convert under the other!"

## **7. Promise**

Acts 16:27-34 elucidates the simple plan of salvation. I want to emphasize something that the Holy Spirit emphasizes and that is that Jesus Christ is Lord. Throughout the book of Acts, again and again Jesus is addressed as Lord in reference to God's great salvation by grace. Notice Acts 2:21; 2:36; 4:33; 7:59; 9:6; 10:4, 36; 11:23; 15:11; 20:20, 21; 28:31. How can we take lightly what God enunciates so clearly? We accept Jesus as Savior, which means we have forgiveness of sins. We accept Jesus as Lord, which means we turn our life over to Jesus as the ruler of our lives. Jesus is Lord, whether we confess it or not. Whether you do or do not confess today, one day you shall. We all shall! "That

*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10, 11). If you confess today, you are saved. If you wait for the great throne judgment you will be eternally lost. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ today and be saved! “...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Corinthians 6:2b).*

If jailhouse religion worked in the jailhouse, it can work in God’s House today! If you are not saved, would you not decide now? You’ll never regret it! God loves you. *“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.